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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 003292

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SUBJECT: VENEZUELA'S REGIONAL ELECTIONS: COMING TO AN END

REF: A. A: CARACAS 02758

[1](#)B. B: CARACAS 02885

Classified By: Abelardo A. Arias, Political Counselor, for  
Reason 1.4(d)

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) National Electoral Council (CNE) President Francisco Carrasquero declared October 19 that only 2.1% of Venezuelan voters registered did not have addresses. Opposition leaders, who had alleged that more than a million persons did not meet the legal requirement of having an address, challenged the CNE to make the electoral registry public and open it for scrutiny. Preparing for the October 31 elections, the CNE increased the number of voting centers, voting tables, and electronic voting machines and decreased the number of voting table workers. There will be no international observers like the Carter Center, Organization of American States (OAS), and the European Union. Abstentions are the chief obstacle to the opposition, which has a lot riding on these elections. End Summary.

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The Electoral Registry  
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[1](#)2. (U) A committee of Governors and Mayors complained to the National Electoral Council (CNE) on October 13 that more than 1.8 million new voters in the electoral register do not have addresses listed in the register as required by electoral law. On October 19 CNE President, Francisco Carrasquero, publicly and vehemently contradicted the claim during a press conference. He insisted the CNE technical committee found 40,283 Qters without addresses by cross-checking voter information. Asserting that only 2.1% of the people the opposition produced as "proof of fraud" were without addresses, Carrasquero demanded that the opposition respect the CNE and desist trying to prevent or delay the regional elections, which he insisted would go forward on October 31.

[1](#)3. (U) Primero Justicia President and National Assembly Deputy, Julio Borges, said that if the CNE were as transparent as it claimed to be the electoral registry would have been posted publicly so all Venezuelans could review it and denounce inconsistencies or incorrect information. Instead, Borges said, the CNE has kept the registry hidden and made a spectacle of having one journalist "check" the notebooks during the press conference October 19. (Note: By law, the CNE is required to publish the official electoral registry and open it for voters to dispute incorrect information, but it has not done so.) Primero Justicia and other political parties have petitioned the Supreme Court (TSJ) to annul the electoral registry or to call for its complete review before regional elections.

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More Centers, More Tables, More People, More Time...  
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[1](#)4. (U) To reduce the amount of time it takes to vote before the regional elections, the CNE created 572 additional voting centers. The CNE also increased and redistributed the number of voting tables (28,617 total) and electronic voting machines (23,595) to be used. The National Electoral Board (JNE) selected 194,242 new poll workers to correspond to the voting table and voting center increases. With time running short, the CNE decided that voters whose voting center has changed would be notified on Election Day when they arrived at their previously assigned voting location.

[1](#)5. (C) The CNE organized training sessions for poll workers October 4-7. According to the poll worker-training manual, 3 principal poll workers and a secretary will run each voting table, rather than by the 5 workers the law calls for. Each voting center will also include a "coordinator", newly appointed by the CNE. (Note: There are no provisions in the electoral law for this type of official.) At centers with

electronic voting machines, after the voting finishes and polls close, the results are to be transmitted, and then a vote count document is to be printed. CNE director Jorge Rodriguez told reporters October 18 that the Governors and Mayors Committee had agreed to a post-election audit that

would allow voting table members to count the ballots when voting ended. The Governors and Mayors contradicted Rodriguez.

16. (U) In preparation for October 31, the CNE conducted a voting simulation October 10. The results gave rise to worries that the increase in centers and redistribution of tables would not be enough to compensate for the time needed per voter to cast a ballot.

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CNE Changes  
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17. (U) On September 27, Director Ezequiel Zamora resigned from the CNE because of differences with the majority. During an October 19 press conference, CNE President Carrasquero urged the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court to examine Director Sobella Mejias' political actions and "take action accordingly." Mejias was acting as a political agent rather than neutral election official and distorting figures, according to Carrasquero. Mejias had complained about alleged irregularities in the electoral register and insisted on a complete review.

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The Legalities  
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18. (U) The NGO Sumate asked Venezuela's Supreme Court to suspend the regional elections because of the violations of the Electoral Law. The illegalities Sumate alleges include: the CNE did not publish the public notice for regional elections that should have been published six months ahead of the elections; irregularities with the electoral registry that were denounced were not resolved; specifications for the technical audits have not been approved; the General Electoral Rules have not been approved nor published; the electronic voting machines have not been properly tested, stored, or guarded; there are no representatives or witnesses from different organizations at the different levels of the electoral process; and the CNE Directorate is still one member short since no official has been named to replace Ezequiel Zamora.

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International Observers  
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19. (U) In early October, the CNE issued invitations to some international observers. The Carter Center declined the invitation citing lack of time and resources to adequately observe, and the lack of confidence in their ability by political actors. The Organization of American States (OAS) also declined saying there was insufficient time to prepare an election observation team. The European Union will not be sending an observation team. (Comment: We believe the invitations were for show, since the CNE knows well the Carter Center and OAS and EU requirements to mount an observation.)

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Comment  
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110. (C) The CNE declaration that the electoral registry is not a problem as the opposition claims comes as no surprise, and Carrasquero's statement about Mejias "political actions" is irony at its best. The opposition's and Sumate's court challenge will languish as it is unlikely that the Supreme Court will issue any decision to contradict the CNE before the regional elections. Predictions of low turnout by opposition voters are likely being exacerbated by the CNE's continuing and public disregard for what the opposition claims are unequal and illegal voting conditions.

111. (C) The main challenge the opposition faces is abstentionism, some of it fueled by opposition leaders' statements after the 8/15 referendum. Having questioned the fairness of the CNE, it is harder for them to convince voters to stand in line again to vote. The regional races remain important, both in terms of giving the opposition authority and resources, and in terms of developing future leaders. Brownfield

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